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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002585

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: SE TURKISH GOVERNORS TONE DEAF ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

REF: A. ADANA 0095

[B](#). ADANA 0090

Classified By: POL Counselor John W. Kunstadter for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

THIS CABLE IS FROM AMCONSUL ADANA.

1.(C) SUMMARY: The Adana and Gaziantep governors have demonstrated a lack of interest in religious freedom issues when raised by AMCON ADANA PO in recent discussions. In these discussions these same officials also have tried to shift discussion of religious freedom into recitals of shopworn GoT policy on the PKK and the lack of legitimacy for the cultural rights agenda of Turkey's Kurdish citizens. Lower level Turkish municipal and police officials, however, continue to respond to Christian concerns, albeit in an as-yet inconclusive fashion. End Summary.

ADANA GOVERNOR RULES OUT POTENTIAL FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ISSUES, DEFLECT DISCUSSION

2.(C) AMCON ADANA PO met 4/28 with Adana governor Cahit Kirac, raising the problems of the Adana Catholic Church's blocked access to the street (Adana 0095). Kirac discounted the issue as a property dispute for the municipality to handle, said that he had seen press reports that AK Mayor Aytac Durak wanted to engage on the issue and that the Turkish constitution provided for freedom of religion, and therefore Christians could not, by definition, have freedom of worship issues in Adana. PO said that many Christians in Adana would differ with his assessment and that the small Protestant community here would be interested in finding a place to open a sanctuary. Kirac shrugged the issue off as little concern of his. (Note: Subsequent more constructive engagement with municipal officials in ref. A).

3.(C) Kirac deflected the discussion to focus on regional issues and his experience in southeast (SE) Turkey, where he also did not see a religious freedom issue. He talked of being a former sub-governor in northern Diyarbakir province and sub-governor in Sirnak during the conflict-ridden 1990's. Asked his assessment of where SE regional issues stood in the Turkish-EU pre-accession dialogue, Kirac, as an Elazig province native who even may be Kurdish, said that the problems in the SE were "all development related, nothing else." He rejected out of hand any need to discuss potential inclusion of Kurdish in future Turkish school curriculums, such as an elective subject, asserting that Kurdish is an "unscientific language" and therefore inappropriate for academic usage.

CHRISTIAN ISSUES IN GAZIANTEP BELOW GOVERNOR'S RADAR

4.(C) On 4/29 AMCON ADANA PO approached Gaziantep governor Lutfullah Bilgin, mentioning U.S. appreciation for the Turkish National Police (TNP's) investigation of the April 2005 incidents (Adana 90). Bilgin initially reacted to the comment in a way clearly indicating that he had no prior knowledge of the issue, but recovered to say that he would mention our appreciation to the Security Director, whom he would see later in the day. He assured the PO that there could be no problem for Christians in Gaziantep based on constitutional provisions for religious freedom in Turkey and the GoT's control of city security. He asserted in addition that Turkey has no religious freedom problems and has proven this by construction of a non-Muslim religious center in Antalya. He was referring to the tourist/foreigners church which PM Erdogan opened last Fall (note: which the EU diplomatic group in Ankara sees as merely for show. End note). PO reminded him of the November 2005 violent incident involving an AMCTI and the string of April 2005 incidents and said that the U.S. could not share his confidence, but again expressed appreciation for continuing TNP attention to these issues.

5.(C) Bilgin then shifted gears, saying that he thought that the recent Prof. Ceaser anti-Americanism public diplomacy presentation in Gaziantep had gone over well, welcoming further similar U.S. outreach. He then offered the "friendly observation" that much anti-Americanism in Gaziantep and SE Turkey would "evaporate quickly" if the U.S. "just would attack the PKK in northern Iraq." He offered analogies of hungry people forgetting their past hunger once they have eaten. He also said that Gaziantep's internal migrants (read: ethnic Kurdish citizens) literally were hungry and really just wanted jobs and better family welfare which the U.S. and others (read: the EU) "really could help if you bring business and welfare assistance directly here. That is the

real answer."

6.(SBU) In continuation, Bilgin also said that Gaziantep was southern Turkey's economic center and that it "deserved" to have the consulate bring American business to it." PO described the perception of a lack of transparency in the Turkish judiciary, shifting tax system vis-a-vis international business and lack of protection for intellectual property rights which dampens U.S. investor enthusiasm for Turkey. This seemed news to the governor and he talked about Italian interest in investing in Gaziantep. (Note: an Italian trade minister visited Gaziantep in late 2004. End Note.)

17. (SBU) In closing, Bilgin made a passionate appeal for the Packard Humanities Institute to get re-involved with the Zeugma archeological project (Packard withdrew in 2004 after being grossly mistreated by local nationalist bigots, who prefer to keep the mosaics in poor condition rather than let them be decently restored by foreign specialists and lent on exhibit elsewhere). He said that new Culture Minister Attilla Koc just had visited Gaziantep and had said that Zeugma was one of his highest priorities. He said that the Culture Ministry would give the museum project another USD three million. He hoped that the new museum extension, which PO also visited and found interesting yet incomplete, would open in mid-June 2005. Another consulate contact, who also saw the Culture Minister that day, said that PM Erdogan had told the new Minister that Zeugma was to be one his top three national priorities.

EDELMAN